

Wastewater Operator Certification Program Advisory Committee

Meeting Summary

April 7, 2004

Attendees included: Todd Carlson, Holly Fuller, Tammie McClure, Doug Miller, Jill Parker, Tim Pelton, Don Proctor, and Janice Sedlak

Welcome

Doug Miller chaired the meeting in Yakima at the Ecology Central Regional Office.

Reviewed and accepted the agenda and the November 2003 summary of the committee meeting.

Committee Membership

It has been difficult to fill membership vacancies as a whole, but particularly at the Group I level. And we have members whose term is up, but would like to continue volunteering on the committee. We also have members that came into the committee as a representative for one group of operators and then upgraded certification. The appearance is then that the committee does not have representation for the lower level certified operator.

Committee Recommendation: The committee agreed that having operator representation was more important than term limits and/or restrictions regarding what level of certification a member holds. We also agreed that it is important to maintain the ???historical integrity??? of the committee and that with only two meetings a year, two or three year term limits are not lending itself to that historical integrity. We agreed that the terms for new members will be five years. However, members are welcome to stay as long as we have vacancies on the committee. If ever there are more volunteers than positions available on the committee, the committee may look to long time members to resign their positions.

Action: Tammie will request a letter of interest and a brief resume from all the operators that have shown an interest in volunteering and then send the submittals on to the committee members for review. The committee will fill the vacant positions with available volunteers. The goals will continue to be to get two representatives from each certification level; one from each side of the mountains and to refill their position after five years.

Professional Growth

Tammie's Report: Due either to non payment of the annual renewal or not documenting professional growth, approximately 200 certificates were revoked in March 2004. Of 1,943 active operators prior to December 31, 2003, we currently (after the February exam) have 1,799 active operators.

The data entry of professional growth documentation, particularly at the end of the professional growth period, gets extremely bogged down. Part of the problem is that many things are due toward the end of each year (October exam, renewals, newsletter, etc.) and when the end of the professional growth period is one of them (every three years) the workload is enormous. With approximately 1,900 operators the phone calls alone are staggering and the fax machine runs continuously. Other contributors to the slow down is that each training course must be coded

and entered into the database and then entered for the individual operators. This can get extremely slow and tedious when training is being submitted in one or two hour blocks for each operator. In most cases these are employer sponsored training such as monthly safety trainings or other on site training that are either sent in one at a time or in a large stack at the end of the year or at the end of the professional growth period.

Also adding to the slow down is the fact that many operators and/or trainers do not have the operator's certification number or other identifiers on the training documentation submitted. This means that Tammie has to search the database for the name listed and hope that she is giving credit to the right person. This takes time and if there is more than one person with a similar name in the database, Tammie is unable to enter the information. Incomplete or questionable documentation ended up in a question pile while complete documentation got entered. In most cases the questions didn't get answered until an operator called to check on their documentation which was frustrating for both the operator and Tammie.

Committee Recommendation: Applications for CEU assignments should be submitted in no less than three hour blocks and the attendees must have attended a minimum of three hours to receive credit. Once we begin to get the word out operators should get a twelve month grace period before this recommendation becomes a requirement. Tammie should outline expectations for professional growth documentation and post the expectations on the website and include them in the newsletter. Tammie should create a form letter of some sort, so that incomplete professional growth documentation can be returned quickly and easily to the operator/trainer/employer for correction (this addresses one of two concerns brought up in the roundtable portion of the meeting).

Committee Recommendation: The goal should be that trainers and/or operators should submit applications for CEU assignment at least two weeks prior to the training. This is particularly important if the operator/trainer/employer questions whether the training is relevant or whether CEUs will be assigned. Without prior approval there is no way to ensure that an operator will get credit for the training. The operator is the person responsible for making sure that their professional growth requirement is met; therefore, the operator should know before spending time or money taking the training whether it will count toward the requirement or not. Incomplete information regarding a particular training may result in no CEUs being assigned.

Committee Recommendation: Certification numbers must be on all professional growth documentation submitted. Once the word gets out there should be a twelve month grace period. After that, documentation submitted without a certification number will be returned to the operator.

Exams

Tammie's Report: February 2004 exam statistics –

Grp OIT/I	36 examinees	84% passed
Grp II	23 examinees	89% passed
Grp III	26 examinees	50% passed
Grp IV	11 examinees	80% passed

The Association of Boards of Certification (ABC) is currently developing new exams called multiple entry exams. The ABC standardized exams (which is what Washington State uses) were developed to be administered in sequence (i.e., the Group I before the II and II before the III and so on). Washington along with many other states do not require that the exams be given in sequence. In our case the law says that if an individual meets the minimum levels of education and experience for a particular level of certification, they will be allowed to take the exam. The members of ABC requested that they develop an exam that does not need to be taken in sequence to most effectively measure competency.

Committee Recommendation: The latest exam statistics should be posted on the website for all to see (the next website update will include the statistics for the last three exams). The committee also agreed that we should switch to the new “multiple entry exams” once they are available. Tammie should develop a communication plan to get the word out.

Action: Tammie will develop a communication plan to get information out regarding the new ABC exam (i.e., via the newsletter, the website, meetings & conferences). It is unknown when the multiple entry wastewater exams will be available for our use.

Revocations

Tammie's Report: Two certificates have been revoked this year due to gross negligence that included the improper reporting and cleanup of a spill and altering discharge monitoring reports to meet permit requirements. One of the two operators has appealed this decision to the PCHB (case pending).

Program Policies

Committee Recommendation: The committee would like to list committee recommendations separately from program policies. Both policies and recommendations will be posted on the website.

Committee Recommendation: Add a policy regarding the certified operator's responsibility to maintain and submit professional growth documentation as per chapter 173-230-080 WAC

Roundtable

Tammie asked the committee to look over the website once it has been updated and let her know if they have any suggestions. The committee has asked that an Email be sent to them when the website is updated and ready for review.

Two concerns were raised by Todd Carlson:

1. The renewal certificate (validation card) was not received quickly enough.
I (Tammie) think that we determined that it was the Department of Health's water validation cards had been delayed-I had heard that they had a problem getting them out this year. The wastewater validation cards were mailed out weekly as the renewals were entered.

2. The notice of CEU approvals or questions needs to get to the individual operators faster so that they know where they stand.

See Committee Recommendation under Professional Growth topic above.

ABC asked Tammie to put together a group of subject experts to review questions for the ABC Group I exam. This review must be done by mid July.

Action: Tammie will be updating the website to include:

- Committee Recommendations
- CEU approval requirements & eventually CEU approvals
- Updated policies
- Latest committee meeting summaries

Doug Miller requested that since Cheryl Bergener is a member of the committee, he would like her or someone from her organization to attend the meetings.

Action: Tammie will contact Cheryl and pass on the request.

Next Meeting

Holly Fuller has agreed to chair the next meeting scheduled for (second Wednesday) November 10, 2004 in Western Washington. Holly was going to check into the possibility of having the meeting at the new Centralia WWTF. The meeting room is also the break room, so we'll need to plan accordingly. The meeting after that is scheduled for the first Wednesday in April 2005 in Eastern Washington.